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AUTHOR Walker, Carolyn; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The Learning Assistance Center's peer tutoring program at Stanford University is described in this paper. Ways are suggested to register students as tutees, match them with tutors, operate tutoring sessions, account for and control tutoring hours, evaluate tutoring performance, and train peer tutors. In this program, tutors are Stanford students who are paid by the college and who agree to take a peer tutor training course that is offered for credit. Appendixes include the forms that the tutoring center uses to administer its program. (MKM)

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ACADEMIC

TUTORING

AT

THE LEARNING ASSISTANCE CENTER

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

by: Carolyn Walker
LAC Director

and

Patrick Von Bargen
Tutoring Program Coordinator

with

Dan Wessner
Tutoring Program Assistant

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Carolyn Walker

Suppose that a Stanford undergraduate knows he or she needs some help in a course. Perhaps the student has recently performed poorly on an exam, failed to complete problem sets, or finally admitted that he or she has been lost in most of the lectures so far. What steps can the student take? He or she can go several places for help, but where the student goes depends on (1) what kind of problem it is and (2) what course is giving trouble.

If the trouble is that the student cannot understand one particular concept or can't master one troublesome technique, the problem is limited in scope and correcting it doesn't require a lot of someone's time. So the student should either see the instructor or the TA, after class, during office hours, or during discussion sections, or go to the department's "consulting center" if there is one.

The Instructor or TA

Usually ten minutes with an instructor or a TA is adequate time to solve a problem which is limited in scope. One difficulty which arises here is that students sometimes have a hard time getting those ten minutes. Some instructors and TAs keep irregular office hours; also, in especially difficult courses, students sometimes find long lines of people waiting to see the instructor or TA. Another problem is that there are students who are too timid or embarrassed to take their problems to their instructors. These students are afraid they will not be able to articulate their difficulty in the time their instructors can afford. Or they worry their admission of confusion will make a bad impression on an important person, their professor.

Consulting Centers

Alternatively, if the problem a Stanford student has concerns math, or chemistry, or physics, or biology, he or she can go to one of the departmental "consulting centers": the Physics Reference Frame, the Chemistry Information Room, the Mathematics Consulting Center, or the Biology Bridge. These are drop-in centers open about 20-50 hours a week; usually one TA is available for consultation. These centers are especially good at fielding discreet problems —— difficulties with problem sets, homework, points made in lectures, difficult passages in textbooks. They each serve over 1000 students per quarter. The Learning Assistance Center (LAC) contributes one full teaching assistantship to these centers, to be divided equally among them.

For the purposes they serve, these centers are quite effective. The only trouble students experience comes as no surprise. Around exam time the centers get very crowded and the lines grow long. And, of course, these centers cannot help with problems in other courses.

Nor can these consulting centers solve their problems if students have more fundamental problems which require regular, long-term help. For students may be having trouble because (1) their study skills, irrespective of the content of any particular course, are poor; or (2) they find the pace of the course fast and want more thorough explanations and more examples of the course material; or (3) they suffer from some "learning block"; or (4) their background in the course area is deficient and they need more help "learning to think" in the subject area. So if students have one of these fundamental problems with the course, or if they have been unable to see their instructor or TA, or if they have found the consulting centers unable to help, their next step is to come to the LAC.

Peer Tutoring

When the student arrives at the LAC, he or she completes a Tutor Request Form (see Form A, attached). Within two days, the Tutoring Program Assistant picks up the completed forms and during the evening, phones the student.

The Tutoring Assistant first asks students to briefly describe the nature of their problem, if they can. She then asks students whether they have tried to see their instructor, the TA, or the relevant consulting center. The Assistant always suggests that students try those first if they haven't yet done so. If a student has taken all these steps, or explains that his or her problem is too large for these services to help, the Assistant will then assign the student an LAC tutor.

After the Assistant Coordinator's preliminary screening over the phone, she gives the student the name and phone number of one of the tutors. (see Form B.) It is then the tutee's responsibility to call the tutor to arrange a time and place to meet for the first time. The Assistant Coordinator should also inform the tutee of the limitations on the number of tutoring hours available to him. (See Form A again.) The tutee is welcome to arrange privately for a tutoring agreement with the tutor after he has used up the tutoring hours provided by the LAC's budget.

In assigning a tutee to a certain tutor, the Assistant Coordinator tries to place tutees from the same course and section with the same one or two tutors. This practice gives the tutor greater familiarity with the course and section he is helping in and also encourages the formation of small groups tutorials, which save the LAC money and often prove even more beneficial to the tutees. The Assistant Coordinator tries to balance the assignments fairly among all the tutors.

The job of the tutor in the first session is to determine with precision which of the "fundamental problems" we listed above our student has. The ideal which our tutors strive for is to teach students in such a way that they learn how to teach themselves, and how to develop study habits which will carry them after they leave our tutoring program. The tutor will determine if he or she can help the student or should refer the student elsewhere in the university. For example, if the problem derives from a psychological block, the tutor will investigate whether to recommend someone at the student health service to help the student. At the end of each session, the student and the tutor will decide whether and when they should meet again.

Peer Tutoring Reports

After each session, the LAC tutor fills out a Comment Sheet (see Form C, attached). Under "Tutor's Remarks," he or she notes the tasks taken up during that session, describes the progress the tutee made during the session, and outlines the topics for the next session. Twice a month the tutor brings these Comment Sheets to the LAC secretary. She enters the hours tutored on each tutor's "time report." And then, on the 7th and 22nd of each month, the tutor receives a university paycheck for the hours he or she has tutored at a rate of $4.00/hour.

At the end of each quarter and upon request by the Tutoring Coordinator, the Assistant Coordinator will report on the current status of the program in terms of the number of tutoring hours used, the number and status of tutees and tutors, and so on. This information helps the program stay within budget, and it also helps pinpoint some problem spots in undergraduate education at the university. The various departments and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies are all most interested in this information. In addition, many

professors request feedback from the tutors involved in their course and section; the Assistant Coordinator encourages the tutors and professors to establish communication where it is presently absent. (See Form D.)

Furthermore, at the end of each quarter, the Assistant Coordinator mails questionnaires to a sampling of the tutees to determine how the program is working and what kind of job certain tutors are doing. (See Form E.) If the Assistant Coordinator has doubts about a certain tutor, she mails questionnaires to almost all of his or her tutees. And at times certain tutors themselves ask that the Assistant Coordinator try to elicit feedback from as many of their tutees as possible.

The Assistant Coordinator also reminds tutors to fill out an application at the beginning of each quarter that they wish to tutor and informs any continuing tutees that they must reapply for the new quarter. (See Form F.) This step is necessary to provide the Assistant Coordinator with knowledge of those truly interested in tutoring and with the number of continuing tutees. This procedure also excludes the possibility of receiving a lot of comment sheets late in the quarter from a tutor who was thought to have quit tutoring, with many hours devoted to tutees who were thought to have stopped using our services.

Who are the LAC Tutors?

LAC tutors are all Stanford students, mostly undergraduates. They are generally upperclassmen who have successfully completed the introductory courses in the academic series which give so many freshmen and sophomores trouble enough that they come to the LAC for tutoring help: math, chemistry, physics, foreign languages, etc.

Our tutors first hear about our program from several sources: (1) professors announce that we are looking for tutors in upper division courses; (2) residence assistants tap residents who they think might become good tutors; (3) LAC brochures and registration materials announce that we hire tutors; (4) the Program Coordinator and his Assistant approach some students personally.

Each student interested in becoming a tutor fills out an application from (see Form F, attached). We generally have twice as many applicants as we need. We select our tutors on the basis of the expected tutee demand in certain subject areas, the applicants' qualifications, contacts with the applicants' references, and some personal interviews. Exhibit 1 shows the versatility of our staff for fall quarter 1979-80.

In order to insure the competence of our tutors and the continuity of our program, we hire only those students who agree to tutor for at least 15 hours over the whole quarter and who have taken, or will concurrently take, LAC 120, the peer tutor training course.

Peer Tutor Training

LAC 120, "Peer Tutoring Techniques," is offered for one unit of credit and meets for one hour a week in a seminar format. Readings include selections from Conceptual Blockbusting by James Adams (1), How to Study in College by Walter Pauk, (2), Intelligence Can Be Taught by Arthur Whimbey (3), and many LAC study skills handouts. We videotape portions of two of each tutor's tutoring sessions: one at the start of the quarter, and one at the end. We require that each tutor interview the instructor for each course in which he tutors. Class discussions vary over the quarter. Some are devoted to the three main themes of the readings: (1) tutoring theory, or how to tutor, (2) common problem-solving blocks, and (3) effective learning skills and study techniques. Others involve critiquing and videotapes or sharing particularly

difficult tutoring problems tutors have recently experienced. Sometimes we host a guest speaker -- usually an instructor of a course whose students request a lot of tutoring help.

Generally the course receives high marks, and most tutors describe it as indispensable to their adequate preparation as tutors. But it likely provides only a minimum of preparation given the enormity of the tutors' task. For these 25-30 LAC tutors will take on some 350 tutees over the course of one academic year.

Bibliography

1. Adams, James L. Conceptual Blockbusting. Stanford, California: Stanford Alumni Association, 1974.

2. Pauk, Walter. How To Study in College, 2nd ed. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1974.

3. Whimbey, Arthur. Intelligence Can Be Taught. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1975

FORM "A"

TUTORING REQUEST FORM

Learning Assistance Center
123 Meyer Library
497-2207

Name: _____ Date: _____

Home Phone: _____ Best Time to Phone _____

Mailing Address this Quarter _____ Next Qrtr: _____

Campus Residence: _____

Year in School (circle one): F S Jr Sr Grad

Course you want tutoring in:

Title: _____ Course Number: _____

Instructor: _____ Section Instrctr: _____

How would you describe the problem you need help for? _____

_____

_____.

Have you sought the help of your instructor, TA, or Departmental Consulting Center? _____. If not, why not? _____

_____

If you have, how can we help you in ways that your instructor, TA, or Consulti Center could not? _____

_____

FOR LAC USE ONLY:

Tutor (s) assigned: _____ Date: _____

_____ Date: _____

++++++

FORM "B"

TUTOR ASSIGNMENT SHEET

Tutor's Name (Phone Number) Course & Section Tutored:	Tutee's Name	(Phone Number)	Course:
_____ ( ) _____	_____	_____	_____
_____ ( ) _____	_____	_____	_____
_____ ( ) _____	_____	_____	_____
_____ ( ) _____	_____	_____	_____
_____ ( ) _____	_____	_____	_____

FORM "C"

COMMENT SHEET

Name of Tutor:_____ Name of Student:_____

Time Tutored:_____ Date Tutored:_____

Preparation Time:_____ Subject:_____

REMEMBER: Comment Sheets are due on the 13th and 28th of each month. Please pay strict attention to these due dates. We cannot properly budget our program if we receive accumulations of delinquent comment sheets.

COMMENT SHEET

Name of Tutor:_____ Name of Student:_____

Time Tutored:_____ Date Tutored:_____

Preparation Time:_____ Subject:_____

REMEMBER: Comment Sheets are due on the 13th and 28th of each month. Please pay strict attention to these due dates. We cannot properly budget our program if we receive accumulations of delinquent comment sheets.

FORM "D"

March 22, 1979

Dear Professor Blank:

The Learning Assistance Center runs a peer tutoring program for Stanford undergraduates who still need help in certain courses even after they have sought the assistance of their professors, TAs, and departmental consulting centers. And a number of tutees this quarter have asked for help in your course, Blank 101.

Of course, our tutors have an intimate knowledge of the particular problems their tutees have struggled with this quarter. Would you find specific information about these problems interesting and helpful? If so, we would be pleased to have one of our staff who tutors in your course contact you. Just call me at 7-2207, and we will make arrangements convenient for you.

Sincerely,

Patrick Von Bargen
Tutoring Coordinator

PVB:cjt

FORM "E"

Dear ,

Last quarter you worked with _____ in _____. I would very much appreciate your response to the following questions, and would like to share your comments with your tutor. I would also like to protect your anonymity if you wish it, and therefore ask you to check one of the boxes below.

☐ Delete my name and course from this evaluation before it is given to my tutor

☐ Leave my name and course number on this evaluation when it is given to my tutor

****

1. Did you complete the course for which you received tutoring? _____
2. If not, why did you drop it?
   - A. lost interest
   - B. content too difficult
   - C. didn't get tutoring early enough
   - D. tutoring didn't help
   - E. other _____
3. If you did complete the course, what was your final grade? _____
4. Do you think your grade fairly reflects your knowledge of the course? _____
5. Was tutoring helpful in the attainment of that grade? _____
6. In what ways was your tutor helpful?

7. In what ways could your tutor imorove?

8. Would you recommend this tutor to other students?

9. Do you have any suggestions for the improvement of the tutoring service? (Use back of paper for suggestions)

Thank you for your responses.

Sincerely,

Tutoring Coordinator

FORM "F"

APPLICATION TO TUTOR

Learning Assistance Center
123 Meyer Library
497-2207

Name: _____

Social Security Number: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Residence Address: _____

Phone: _____ Best time to reach you: _____

Year or status at Stanford: _____

Present employer on campus, if any: _____

Subjects in which you wish to tutor: _____

_____

_____

Qualifications for competence to tutor in these subjects (list, for example, any prior tutoring experience, courses you have taken with grades if you like, and any other facts supporting your qualifications):

Please list below faculty or instructor references whom we could contact and who could speak to your qualifications in the subject.

Name: _____ Department: _____ Phone: _____

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

Additional Comments:

PLEASE NOTE: All LAC tutors must have taken or concurrently be taking "LAC 120," a peer-tutoring course. If you wish to tutor and have not yet taken this course, please sign the class list. Thank you for your interest.

EXHIBIT 1

TUTOR	SUBJECT COMPETENCE
#1	Chemistry, Biology, Physicis, Math, Spanish
#2	Math, Engineering
#3	Physics, Engineering
#4	Chemistry, Spanish
#5	Math, English, German
#6	Chemistry, English
#7	Math, French
#8	Math
#9	Chemistry, French
#10	Chemistry, English
#11	Chemistry, Biology
#12	Chemistry
#13	Chemistry, Biology
#14	Chemistry, Biology, Engineering, English, French
#15	Math
#16	Math
#17	Math, Engineering
#18	Math
#19	Math, Chemistry
#20	Math, English, Spanish